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Comments by the South African Pagan Rights Alliance on the 'Mission Statement' of the Progressive Pagan Alliance (PPA)

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According to the recently published Mission Statement of the Progressive Pagan Alliance, the PPA claims to seek the preservation of modern Paganism, and protection for all Pagans against discrimination. This affirmation is repeated and reaffirmed in the PPA's Mission Statement and Aims and Objectives several times.

"The Progressive Pagan Alliance, herein after referred to as PPA, represents a proactive and cooperative approach with which to seek preservation and protection of Pagans and Paganism from discrimination, and to claim equality for Pagans and Pagan practices within South Africa, as enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights."

[Progressive Pagan Alliance Mission Statement (23rd October 2007) www.pro-pagan.org.za]

"The PPA aims towards obtaining recognition, respect and equality for Paganism."

[Progressive Pagan Alliance Mission Statement]

"We represent groups and individuals aligned with our goals who wish to claim equality for Paganism as a spiritual movement based on a European Ancestral Heritage that has historically suffered suppression under Abrahamic religious philosophies and dogma."

[Progressive Pagan Alliance Mission Statement]

"The PPA aims towards achieving equality and equal standing of Pagans and Pagan practices in South Africa."

[Aims & Objectives 2. - Progressive Pagan Alliance Mission Statement]

"The PPA aims to ensure equal opportunity, rights and recognition of Pagan Clergy."

[Aims & Objectives 2.1. - Progressive Pagan Alliance Mission Statement]

But the PPA's often repeated insistence that self-defined Pagan Witches relinquish the terms 'Witch' and 'Witchcraft' stands in direct contradiction to their aims and objectives to (a) seek the preservation of our collective European Pagan ancestral heritage, (b) protect Pagans from discrimination, and (c) achieve equality for and equal standing of Pagans and Pagan practices within South Africa.

Modern Witchcraft is an internationally recognised Pagan spirituality and has been instrumental in the formation and development of modern Paganism.

Essentially the PPA's insistence on persuading members of a recognised religious minority to relinquish their right to self-identify amounts to an act of suppression of individual liberty and equality - in effect, the suppression of the **inalienable right** of every individual to self-

determination, and to do so as free and equal citizens of a democratic dispensation which is bound by law to protect and promote religious freedom and equality for all equally. [1]

Individual self-determination and self-identity (what one calls oneself and how one defines what one is) are not mutually exclusive principles. The individual and communal right to self-definition and self-determination is a cornerstone of the principles of freedom of religion and belief and is constitutionally enshrined through the notion of according and protecting human dignity to and for all equally.

In 'Hegel's Philosophy of Right' (1821) George Hegel wrote, *"The right to what is in essence inalienable is imprescriptible, since the act whereby I take possession of my personality, of my substantive essence, and make myself a responsible being, capable of possessing rights and with a moral and religious life, takes away from these characteristics of mine just that externality which alone made them capable of passing into the possession of someone else. When I have thus annulled their externality, I cannot lose them through lapse of time or from any other reason drawn from my prior consent or willingness to alienate them."* [2]

The right to human dignity is based on the common assumption that all men and women have the right to have their "substantive essence" respected simply by virtue of their belonging to the human family.

No man or woman should determine for another how that other should think or define themselves, their beliefs or religion. Every individual has the exclusive right to **self-ownership**.

The father of the American Revolution, Samuel Adams (1722-1803) wrote, *"If men, through fear, fraud, or mistake, should in terms renounce or give up any natural right, the eternal law of reason and the grand end of society would absolutely vacate such renunciation. The right to freedom being the gift of Almighty God, it is not in the power of man to alienate this gift and voluntarily become a slave."* [3]

As Pagan Witches, we cannot and will not relinquish our inalienable rights to self-ownership, self-identification, self-definition and self-determination. To do so would indeed be an affront to our dignity, liberty and right to belief and religion.

"Freedom of religion is considered by many in many nations and people to be a fundamental human right." [4]

The Progressive Pagan Alliance would have you believe that those Pagans who actively seek, as cooperative individuals within an already established and identifiable religious community of Witches, to manifest their inalienable rights to self-ownership, self-identification, self-definition and self-determination, are placing in jeopardy *"the most important issues, namely, official recognition of Paganism as a religion and the granting of all other constitutional rights to Pagans."*

"The PPA aims to assist those who claim to be Eurocentric Witches to understand that much of what they do and say in the struggle for reclamation of the terms 'witch' and 'witchcraft' in South Africa, could harm the Pagan cause if we are not willing to concede that these terms are not appropriate in the current climate in South Africa. We recognize and respect the right of individual Pagans to self-identify, however the PPA holds the position that it does not support public reclamation of these terms because they are so negatively perceived by the majority of South Africans. [and] The PPA stands against any Pagan institution that places the reclamation of contentious English words ahead of all other rights and freedoms that Pagans in South Africa seek to gain. We oppose any group or person that refuses to compromise on this issue, because it may ultimately jeopardise the most important issues, namely, official recognition of Paganism as a religion and the granting of all other constitutional rights to Pagans."

[Aims & Objectives 6. and 7. - Progressive Pagan Alliance Mission Statement]

Clearly, the PPA seeks not only to suppress the inalienable rights to self-ownership, self-identification, self-definition and self-determination of South African Pagans, but also to censor the use of *"contentious English words"*, in this instance, the words "witch" and "witchcraft".

The obvious fact that Witchcraft is internationally recognised and accepted as not only a Pagan spirituality, but as one of the most influential spiritualities defining modern Paganism, merely reinforces the perception that the PPA is not in business of preserving and protecting the hard-won rights of Pagan Witches in South Africa, and seems determined instead to redefine Paganism in South Africa by excluding Witchcraft entirely.

The PPA has stated that it will forgo "*the right of Pagans*" to use those "*contentious English words*". It has also stated that it will attempt to persuade Pagans in South Africa to do the same.

The PPA also seeks to confirm the definition of Witchcraft as "*butsakatsi*" - loosely translated as 'malefic' - harmful; maleficent - hurtful and criminal; and malevolent - desirous of evil to others.

*"The aim of the PPA here would include ensuring the protection of Pagans and Paganism by excluding same from any definitions of so-called 'witchcraft' (butsakatsi) as defined by the * Suppression of Witchcraft Act or any legislation formulated to replace that act."*
[Aims & Objectives 5.2. - Progressive Pagan Alliance Mission Statement]

* It should here be noted that the Suppression of Witchcraft Act of 1957 does not define 'witchcraft'.

The South African Pagan Rights Alliance regards the PPA's stated position on the question of the definition of Witchcraft to be a public betrayal of the spirit of modern Paganism and of Witchcraft as practiced by South African Witches, and as understood within a modern Pagan context, as a recognised Pagan spirituality.

In the words of Samuel Adams, "*The liberties of our country, the freedom of our civil Constitution, are worth defending at all hazards; and it is our duty to defend them against all attacks. We have received them as a fair inheritance from our worthy ancestors: they purchased them for us with toil and danger and expense of treasure and blood, and transmitted them to us with care and diligence. It will bring an everlasting mark of infamy on the present generation, enlightened as it is, if we should suffer them to be wrested from us by violence without a struggle, or to be cheated out of them by the artifices of false and designing men.*" [5]

And finally, in the words of John Adams (1735-1826) Founding Father and second U.S. President, "*Be not intimidated... nor suffer yourselves to be wheedled out of your liberties by any pretense of politeness, delicacy, or decency. These, as they are often used, are but three different names for hypocrisy, chicanery and cowardice.*" [6]

References:

[1] Inalienable rights - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inalienable_rights

[2] 'Hegel's Philosophy of Right'(1821) George Hegel, T.M. Knox, trans. Oxford University Press, 1967. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inalienable_rights

[3] Samuel Adams (1722-1803)

[4] Davis, Derek H.. The Evolution of Religious Liberty as a Universal Human Right http://usinfo.state.gov/dd/eng_democracy_dialogues/religion/religion_essay.html

[5] Samuel Adams

[6] John Adams (1735-1826) Founding Father and second U.S. President